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TEACHING CREATION AND EVOLUTION IN IOWA SCHOOLS

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Introduction

In February, 1977 a bill (H.F. 154) was introduced in the Iowa House of Representatives that read as follows:

"If a public school district offers courses which teach pupils about the origin of humankind and which include scientific theories relating to origin, instruction shall include consideration of the creation theory as supported by modern sciences."¹

In May 1977 the Urbandale School District made a written appeal to the Iowa Department of Public Instruction to consult with experts in the science community to determine if the evidence used to support the creationist theory was credible and should be made available to students as an example of good scientific investigation.

In June, 1977 a request was made to the Iowa Department of Public Instruction by a member of the Iowa legislature to study the status of the teaching of creation in public schools of other states. The Department assumed its responsibility with the science consultant, Curriculum Division, initiating the study in July 1977.

In order to help assure objectivity in the drafting of guidelines, a great deal of input from a diversity of individuals and organizations was necessary.

In Science Textbook Controversies and Politics of Equal Time, Nelkin explained the rationale behind the revivel of fundamentalism.

"Faith in science persists when it satisfies a social need. If science loses credibility ('planet earth is in trouble,' the creationists claim), people will grope for more fulfilling constructs. Science threatens the plausibility of nonrational beliefs, but it has not removed the uncertainties that seem to call for such beliefs.

"The revival of fundamentalism fills a social void for its adherents. By using representations that are well adapted to the twentieth century, by claiming scientific respectability, or by arguing that science is as value-laden as other explanations, modern textbook watchers offer intellectual plausibility as well as salvation, and the authority of science as well as the certainty of scripture. Poorly understanding the process of science, they seek to resolve the old warfare between religion and science through popular decision."²

Procedures

1. A national survey of State Departments of Education, inquiring into the status of the teaching of creation and evolution in public schools,

was conducted in late July 1977. Forty-five states responded to the survey. It was discovered that few state departments of education had developed guidelines to deal with the controversy. Those states currently attempting to deal with the appropriateness of creation concepts being taught in the public school science classroom either had: state adoption committees for screening such material; advocated neutrality according to the Schempp case (374 U.S. 296)³; or had approved instructional material lists developed by the state department or board of education. Most states utilizing position papers to respond to citizen inquiries related to teaching creation concepts in science classrooms incorporated those developed by AAAS, NSTA, NABT, CS³ or state teachers associations.

2. All major national and state science and education associations were contacted for their position. Most national science organizations were found to take the position that teaching creationism, or other sectarian doctrines, in public schools violates the doctrine of separation of church and state and presents other constitutional conflicts which restrict academic freedom. Among the organizations contacted were the following:

- National Science Supervisors Association (NSSA)
- Biological Sciences Curriculum Study Committee (BSCS)
- American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)
- National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT)
- National Science Teachers Association (NSTA)
- Council of State Science Supervisors (CS³)
- American Society of Mammalogists
- Washington Science Teachers Association (WSTA)
- Iowa Academy of Science
- Iowa Science Teachers Section — Iowa Academy of Science
- Iowa State Education Association (ISEA)
- Iowa Council of Science Supervisors (CS²)
- Iowa Association of School Administrators
- Iowa Federation of Teachers
- Iowa Association of School Boards
- Iowa Association of School Principals
- Iowa Parent Teachers Association (PTA)

3. As a result of a survey of Iowa science teachers, (Iowa Science Teachers Fall Conference November 11, 1977, Marshalltown Community College) it was discovered that science teachers felt that either a strict separation of church and state should be maintained or guidelines should be provided to local schools for making their own decisions. Approximately 10% of the teachers felt equal time should be given to creation.
4. A study of court cases was undertaken. Related precedent court decisions appear to rest upon constitutional guidelines of the First and Fourteenth Amendments. In addition, neutrality according to Schempp (School District of Abington Township vs. Schempp,) appears to provide precedent guidelines. Justice Clark's interpretation

of the Establishment Clause (1st and 14th Amendment to U.S. constitution) became: If either the purpose or primary effect of legislation advances or inhibits religion, the enactment is unconstitutional; and legislation promoting excessive government entanglement is unconstitutional.

5. Through personal interviews it was observed that most Iowa theologians and religious leaders (conservative and liberal denominations) contacted felt that religion deals with "who" and "why" questions of ultimate origins; while science deals with the "how" of origins and biologic development. In addition, due to the nature of scientific and theologic concepts, the majority of these authorities felt the specifics of each should be confined to their respective houses. Teachers should recognize the personal validity of alternative beliefs, but should then direct student inquiries to appropriate institutions for further explanation. Among the religious and theological organizations contacted were:

American Baptist Churches
Iowa United Methodist Churches
Lutheran Churches
Des Moines Diocese Catholic Churches
10 various individual, local Baptist Churches
Iowa District Church of the Nazarene
Iowa Southern Baptist Fellowship
Episcopal Diocese of Iowa
Iowa Association of Evangelicals
Open Bible College
Iowa Association of Regular Baptist Churches
Episcopal Diocese of Iowa
Mid-American Baptist Churches
Iowa Association of Evangelicals
Jewish synagogues
First Baptist Church
Religion Department — Buena Vista College
Religion Department — Grand View College
School of Religion — University of Iowa

6. As a result of personal interviews, it was ascertained that most Iowa science educators, science supervisors, scientists, Iowa science and technology centers, Iowa Academy of Science, religion and science departments from Iowa state and private colleges and universities, Iowa teacher preparation colleges, science administrators, Iowa education associations, Iowa education administrative organizations, Iowa science teacher section officials and parent-teacher associations contacted felt that creationism was a religious doctrine and was not appropriate for study in science classrooms. Among the individual scientists and science educators contacted were the following:

Dr. Jonas Salk — Salk Institute
 Dr. Carl Sagan — Cornell University
 President — National Association for Research in Science Teaching
 Executive Director — Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS)
 Executive Director — National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT)
 President — Iowa Academy of Science
 President — Iowa Science Teachers Section
 Biology Department — Loras College
 Science Textbook Authors
 College of Education — Drake University
 Administrators — Area Education Agencies
 Department of Biology — Drake University
 St. Ambrose College
 Biology Department — William Penn College
 Science Department, Upper Iowa University
 College of Natural Science, University of Northern Iowa
 Malcolm Price Lab School — University of Northern Iowa
 Education Department — Iowa State University
 College of Engineering — Iowa State University
 Biology Department — Iowa State University
 College of Science and Humanities — Iowa State University
 Science Department — Mount Mercy College
 Science Department — Clarke College
 Science Department — Dowling High School
 Iowa Association of Private Colleges/Universities
 College of Liberal Arts — University of Iowa
 Science Education Department — University of Iowa
 Science or Curriculum generalist consultant — 15 Iowa Area Education
 Agencies
 Science Coordinators or supervisors — 15 Iowa community School Districts
 Chemistry Department — Cornell College
 Des Moines Science Center
 Graceland College

7. Philosophers contacted at state and private universities added a third-party, neutral perspective to the controversy. They felt that the founding fathers of this country incorporated the principle of separation of church and state in order to assure themselves religious freedom. The introduction of creationism into the curriculum would open the doors to all pressure groups, lobbyists and politicians. Those believing in creationism are free to teach it at home and to send their children to religious-oriented private schools. Of central concern was the belief that limits must be placed on the demands that can be made of public schools. Among the responding philosophers were:

Department of Philosophy — Drake University
 Department of Philosophy — University of Iowa

8. In addition input was sought and/or provided by the following interested groups and individuals:

Iowa Civil Liberties Union
 Public Education Religion Studies Center, Wright State University, Ohio
 Institute for Creation Research
 Citizens for God and Country
 Creation — Science Research Center
 Private citizens, approximately 50 letters of input

Conclusion

Based upon patterns of development in various states it became apparent that legislatively mandating curricular content changes in response to special interest pressure groups had not proven workable. It was determined that development of a Department of Public Instruction position statement might better satisfy all parties concerned.

The position paper does not preclude the possibility of released time for instruction, conducted by capable religious leaders, presently being explored by some Iowa schools. The legal precedent for such an alternative has been developed and does not violate constitutional inalienable rights. The Public Education Religion Studies Center (PERSC) has explored many such possibilities.⁴

The position statement finally developed passed through seven revisions prior to its recognition by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction. Many individuals critiqued the paper prior to its final submission to the Department of Public Instruction. The final draft was sent to 235 readers and former contributors with a cover letter asking for their reactions and support. Of the 118 respondents, 99 supported its conceptual bases and intent, 10 could not support it, and 9 were undecided (Table 1).

Table 1

RESPONSE OF KNOWLEDGEABLE READERS TO CONCEPTUAL BASIS AND INTENT OF POSITION PAPER

	Support Conceptual Basis or Intent	Cannot Support Conceptual Basis or Intent	Undecided
Notable Iowa scientists, science educators, college/university administrators, science supervisors, textbook authors	68	1	1
Iowa religious denominations (conservative and liberal), university/college religion departments	17	8	5
State and national science/education organizations	12	1	3
State and private college philosophers	2	0	0
	99	10	9

The resultant position paper, "Creation, Evolution, and Public Education: the Position of the Iowa Department of Public Instruction,"⁵ is intended to provide local schools with a means of handling the controversy surrounding the teaching of creation and evolution in the science classroom without legislative mandates. A representative list of reference and instructional materials has also been developed and is available upon request.

With the reintroduction of this controversy to the 1979 legislative assembly through S.F. 261⁶, the Department of Public Instruction feels this study and resulting position paper should be carefully considered prior to deciding upon mandates for specific curriculum content areas.

To date, the position paper has been requested by approximately 500 scientific and educational associations, institutions and individuals all over the world. In addition, the position statement has been printed in numerous professional science and science education journals as an equitable statement for dealing with this controversy.^{7,8,9,10,11}

Curriculum decisions within content areas have traditionally been determined by local schools. The Department of Public Instruction believes that mandating the teaching of specific theories is not appropriate. Providing local schools with guidelines for making curriculum decisions is preferable for virtually all concerned parties.

The Iowa Department of Public Instruction feels that public schools cannot be surrogate family, church and all other necessary social institutions for students. For them to attempt to do so would be a great disservice to citizens and appropriate institutions.

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